

Alina STRZEMPA (Regensburg)

University of Regensburg

Institute of Slavic Studies Germany

alina.strzempa@sprachlit.uni-regensburg.de

ZONES OF (DIS)COMFORT: UKRAINIAN STUDIES TODAY

On 23 and 24 January 2026, a conference was held at the prestigious *Institut d'études slaves* at Sorbonne University in Paris (France), bringing together German and French experts in East Slavic studies and, in particular, Ukrainian philology. The event was organised as part of the *UNDIPUS* project, which has been closely monitoring and critically evaluating developments in Ukraine over the past four years. It is therefore important to refer first to some concrete outcomes of the *UNDIPUS* project, as these are central to understanding the distinctive character of the Paris conference. In collaboration with the ANR *ArtAtWar* project (hosted by the University of Strasbourg), the workshop aimed to address key methodological challenges and open questions in research on contemporary Ukraine. This was pursued through dialogue with scholars in Slavic and East European Studies, as well as Ukrainian academics who have relocated to France and Germany.

UNDIPUS is an acronym for *(Un)Disciplined: Pluralising Ukrainian Studies – Understanding the War in Ukraine*. As the title suggests, the project centres on scholarly inquiries into the developments currently accompanying the war in Ukraine. The project has been carried out with generous funding from the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology, and Space. *UNDIPUS* is implemented at three German universities, located in Greifswald, Regensburg, and Giessen. It was conceived to address issues of key relevance to Ukraine and its neighbouring regions. Six researchers are engaged in projects that contribute to the pluralisation of debates on Ukraine. In Greifswald, the research focus lies on cultural history, gender studies, and linguistic analysis; in Regensburg, a Ukrainian–Polish comparative perspective is developed, with a regional emphasis on the Donbas and Upper Silesia; and in Giessen, attention is directed towards the reception of contemporary literature with a particular focus on masculinity. This pluralistic orientation helps to shape interdisciplinary frameworks and seeks to develop a broader understanding of Ukrainian studies and its neighbouring disciplines.

The organisation of numerous conferences, round tables, and working meetings in different countries ranks among the most important achievements of the *UNDIPUS* project. Throughout its duration, the project team consistently collaborated with colleagues from international universities. In this way, symposia were held at several universities in Germany (*cf.* Henzelmann, 2023) as well as at institutions abroad over the past four years. These included universities in St. Gallen (Switzerland), Vienna (Austria; *cf.* Strzempa, 2025), Luxembourg (*cf.* Henzelmann, 2024), and, most recently, Paris (France). A distinctive feature of the *UNDIPUS* project is that its members were also actively involved in a range of other academic conferences (*cf.* Lisek, Henzelmann, 2025). This engagement significantly expanded networking opportunities beyond the originally envisaged framework and set new impulses for international academic cooperation.

The important impulses generated through international conferences were reflected in a wide range of publications produced across all three universities involved in the *UNDIPUS* project. To mention only a few examples: in Regensburg, a critical analysis of video games was undertaken (*cf.* Zahirko, 2024). In Greifswald, new insights were presented in the fields of gender studies (*cf.* Crawley, Plakhotnik, 2024), critical feminism (*cf.* Plakhotnik, Mayerchuk, 2023), and recent Ukrainian migration (*cf.* Mayerchuk, Plakhotnik, Yaremchyshyn, 2025). In addition, studies addressing the linguistic situation in Ukraine (*cf.* Henzelmann, 2025b) and in the Republic of Moldova (*cf.* Henzelmann, 2025a) were published, while in Giessen, several noteworthy articles on contemporary prose were produced (*cf.* Chertenko, 2022). This diverse constellation of topics is indicative of the breadth of perspectives from which Ukraine and its neighbouring countries are being approached by scholars. Furthermore, several book projects are currently in preparation and will be made available to the public in the near future (*cf.* Strzempa, Zahirko, in print).

An interim conclusion is that the scope of our activities has been extensive. Over the course of the project, we have produced peer-reviewed articles, book reviews, commentaries, and media interviews. We organised exhibitions, lectures, podcasts, and summer schools, and submitted both monographs and edited volumes for publication with leading academic presses. Moreover, we presented our research foci at the German Congress of Slavists in Bochum (2022) and at the XVIIth International Congress of Slavists in Paris (2025), and hosted the project's concluding conference in Berlin (2025). We therefore maintain that these activities have made a significant contribution to informed scholarly debate in Ukrainian Studies. Taken together, the outputs of the *UNDIPUS* project testify to the effectiveness of its work and to the fact that its concrete results were developed to a high academic standard.

This brings us to the presentations discussed at the conference in Paris. They focused on consolidating the results of the project's work and exploring current options for future cooperation. For this reason, the challenges and prospects arising in the context of such complex and geographically distant settings were addressed first. In the format of a round table, participants discussed approaches that could make academic engagement with Ukraine particularly fruitful.

The round-table discussion was followed by presentations outlining concrete results, future perspectives, and workflows related to individual subprojects. First, Roman Dubasevych (Greifswald) presented the work undertaken within his subproject, demonstrating how myths and debates surrounding the heroisation of Ukraine have consolidated over recent decades. He showed that these processes began long before the current hostilities and have deeper roots, linked, among other factors, to questions of identity formation and to the demarcation from other spheres of influence in Ukraine's immediate neighbourhood. Victoire Feuillebois (Strasbourg) then outlined the conditions under which the *ArtAtWar* project was launched in France. She emphasised that only a small number of specialists in French Slavic studies focus on Ukraine as a central object of research. As a result, addressing certain topics and engaging in sustained academic dialogue with relevant stakeholders can be challenging. Nevertheless, Feuillebois stressed the importance of engaging with developments that enable cultural dialogue with Ukraine, even under particularly difficult conditions. Subsequently, Oleksandr Chertenko (Giessen) presented his findings on contemporary literary production. He demonstrated that a number of authors incorporate gender-related aspects into their works in response to the ongoing war, thereby stimulating new debates within Ukrainian society.

Since tensions with Russia escalated, the phenomenon known as *pushkinopad* has been observed across Ukraine. This term refers to the demonstrative removal of monuments to the Russian writer Alexander Pushkin from public spaces, with the aim of severing symbolic ties to Russian cultural history. In her paper, Riva Evstifeeva (Strasbourg) explained how she documents this phenomenon. Alongside interactive maps, the visualisation of these events through photographic material proves to be a particularly effective method. Subsequently, Martin Henzelmann (Greifswald) examined the consequences of Russian–Ukrainian antagonism for linguistic preferences. In his presentation, he moved beyond an exclusively internal Ukrainian perspective and contrasted it with the linguistic situation in the Republic of Moldova. He concluded that debates concerning language use, as well as the relevant legal frameworks in both countries, differ considerably in several respects and are

strongly shaped by current geopolitical developments. Oleksandr Zabirko and Alina Strzempa (both Regensburg) then addressed the role of the Donbas for Ukraine and Upper Silesia for Poland. The significance of these two industrial regions is reflected in contemporary literary production. Alongside questions of cultural self-image, the historical and linguistic specificities of the respective regions, as depicted by various authors, also play a crucial role.

A central approach within the *UNDIPUS* project has been the deliberate pluralisation of its thematic scope. This orientation was highlighted by Olga Plakhotnik (Greifswald), who focused primarily on processes of the feminisation of social realities. Olga conducted an empirical examination of the conditions under which queer migrants from Ukraine seek refuge, primarily in Germany. Their findings indicate that further sociological research is required to address this field in a comprehensive manner. In her contribution, Kateryna Tarasiuk (Strasbourg) analysed the role of feminist literature in both the Ukrainian and Russian languages in responding to the events of the war. She interrogated decolonial perspectives, with particular attention to their literary and artistic articulation. Finally, Aleksander Dmitriev (Prague) demonstrated how the historical roots of the intellectualisation of Ukraine can be traced. He argued that this process was largely characterised by a drive towards Europeanisation and by negotiations surrounding competing mental maps.

In conclusion, we note that the event in Paris contributed significantly to a deeper understanding of interdisciplinary project work. This can be attributed both to its international orientation and to the thematic diversity of the individual subprojects. It was agreed to further explore thematic overlaps that may serve as common ground for future research. One example that emerged clearly is that literary production in the Ukrainian and Russian languages is perceived differently in France and Germany, offering an excellent basis for comparative approaches. These and other topics will be developed further in the future, not only to raise awareness of Ukrainian studies in Germany and France, but also to foster the growth of international networks engaged in open and critical debate on current geopolitical developments from multiple perspectives. On this basis, we are confident that our experience with collaborative projects provides strong grounds for optimism regarding the establishment of sustainable international networking in the years to come.

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